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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000851

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DEPARTMENT PASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/06/2024  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ CALLS PRESIDENT OBAMA "A PRISONER OF THE  
EMPIRE"

REF: CARACAS 833

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ,  
REASONS 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary: In a media interview following the Venezuelan Independence Day celebration in Ciudad Bolivar on July 5, President Hugo Chavez said that while President Obama is not responsible for the events in Honduras, the United States tacitly supports the coup and the provisional government. Joined by senior military and civilian officials, Chavez presided over an event that showcased the Venezuelan armed forces. Chavez's Independence Day speech highlighted the situation in Honduras, and emphasized the difference between Venezuelan and Honduran soldiers. Calling for Venezuelan soldiers to constantly be on alert, Chavez said the American empire is attacking ALBA (the Bolivarian Alliance of Latin America). Recognizing that President Obama remains very popular among his base, Chavez avoided criticising him while continuing to blame the United States for what he perceives as wrong in the region. End Summary.

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"The Evil American Empire"  
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12. (C) In an interview on the government-supported television station Telesur following the independence day ceremony, President Chavez called on President Obama to "clarify the U.S. position" regarding the coup in Honduras. Insisting that the coup has the tacit support of the U.S. government, Chavez said "I'm not saying that Obama supports the coup - I think Obama is a prisoner of the empire." While Chavez on July 1 had acknowledged President Obama's support for Manuel Zelaya (Reftel), during his July 5 interview Chavez implied that President Obama's position was not clear, saying "it would be great to hear the U.S. president state his position on this issue." (Note: Former Minister of Interior, Ramon Rodriguez Chacin, followed up this statement during a July 6 United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) press conference calling on Obama "to define his position and explain why the coup is being supported by the U.S. military." End Note.) Chavez also harshly criticized the U.S.'s influence in Latin America in his speech during the official Independence Day ceremony. "The time of the Evil American Empire must come to an end," he said, and the U.S. "is responsible for a large part of the ills of this continent."

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Heavy Military Presence and Rhetoric

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¶3. (SBU) Senior Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (GBRV) officials, both civilian and military, joined Chavez in Ciudad Bolivar for the nationally televised Independence Day celebration on July 5. The Commander of Strategic Operations, General Carlos Mata Figueroa was the Master of Ceremonies of the event. Figueroa also attended an extraordinary session of the National Assembly, held in Ciudad Bolivar's Plaza Bolivar on July 5, where he said that, unlike in Honduras, there was no place for rebellion or treason in the Venezuelan Armed Forces, because "the soldiers' discipline and consciousness stem from the ideas and force of the Bolivarian spirit." Chavez's Independence Day speech highlighted the events in Honduras, linking the declaration of an independent Venezuela on July 5, 1811 with the support Venezuela has given to Zelaya in his attempts to return to Honduras. Chavez contrasted Venezuelan and Honduran soldiers, saying that the Venezuelan soldiers were loved by the people while the Honduran soldiers were acting like a foreign occupying force in their own country. "What a shame that we are not Honduran soldiers," Chavez said, "for we would be with the people with weapons in our hands to defend them from the bourgeois and dictatorial government". In Venezuela, Chavez declared, "we will always continue on the path of revolution."

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Comment  
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¶4. (C) Chavez continues to attack U.S. influence and presence in Latin America, and his rhetoric against the U.S. has once again increased in the past week. In spite of President Obama and Secretary Clinton's clear support for

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Zelaya as the legitimate president of Honduras, Chavez has said he is unsure of Obama's personal position, and suspects that the U.S. government as a whole supports the coup in Honduras. Recognizing the U.S. President's popularity in Venezuela and in Latin America, Chavez is likely to continue to attempt to differentiate President Obama from the rest of the U.S. government, and insinuate that the President is not responsible because much of the U.S. government continues to behave as it has in the past.

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